

A More Difficult Path

Reflections on Mormonism. Edited by Truman G. Madsen. Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Center for Religious Studies, 1978. 222 pp., biblio., indices. \$6.95.

Reviewed by C. WILFRED GRIGGS, Assistant Professor of Classics, History and Scriptures at Brigham Young University.

Perhaps the most significant thing to say about the importance of this published collection of papers read at Brigham Young University in March, 1978, is that it exists. To have eleven scholars renowned in various aspects of religious studies visit the Mormon university and present research in their fields related to Mormon beliefs and traditions is a history-making event. (Twelve were invited, but Ernst Benz was unable to be present because of health problems. Nevertheless, a paper authored by him has been included in the volume.) Not all the participants actually made such a comparison as the title of the book suggests, but the implications for Mormonism are sometimes as significant in those which make little or no mention of Latter-day Saint beliefs as those where overt comparisons or distinctions are suggested.

Truman Madsen, editor of the volume, provides an introductory essay outlining the historical emphasis of Mormonism. As well as that worthwhile addition to the guest papers, Madsen has also written brief introductions to each of the symposium papers. Even if these interpretive paragraphs are necessary, they would have been better joined together at the beginning of the volume, because their present placement just before each essay tends to prejudice the reader's perception of the meaning and significance of the contributions. The editor also should have made it clear that Benz was not present at the symposium and, more

important, he should have noted that the Benz paper was translated from German by a BYU faculty member.

Perhaps the best way to illustrate the value of the collection is to give a brief examination and analysis of a few of the essays. With so little yet published on the astounding archaeological discoveries at Tell Mardikh (Ebla) in Syria, any book with an informative article on that subject is worth possessing. David Noel Freedman is less formal in his paper than many of the other contributors, and the significance of his material for the Abrahamic Tradition in history could be overlooked quite easily by a reader not aware of the Ebla texts. The suggestion by such an eminent scholar that evidence now available compels one to consider the book of Genesis as an historical and not just a mythological work is revolutionary in the world of modern scholarship increasingly skeptical in such matters.

W. D. Davies, displaying a more detailed search into Mormon thought than many of the participants, focuses on Mormonism as it relates to the subject of Israel in history. Consonant with his own predilections about the origins and history of Christianity, Davies interprets Mormonism historically as an American reaction against an overly-Hellenized Christianity (hence the Mormon emphasis on the Israelite roots of Christianity) just as Marxism was a European reaction "against the false spiritualization of a too-much Hellenized Christianity. . . ." Even if the Latter-day Saint is uncomfortable with the comparison between Marxism and Mormonism, he can take solace in the seriousness with which Davies analyzes the points of contact between old Israel and Mormon beliefs.

The difficulty of his task in identifying and comparing Messianic passages in the Pseudepigrapha and the Book of Mormon is admitted by James Charlesworth. He notes that not all agree on what is Messianic in the Pseudepigrapha nor on how

the documents have been edited and transmitted. Regardless of how one feels about the validity of Redaction Criticism (e.g. either as leading to a reconstruction of the various editions of a text or simply as an imposition upon a text of the modern critic's imaginative and conjectured theory of textual genesis and development), Charlesworth applies that method to the Book of Mormon and the Pseudepigrapha in order to determine the earliest Messianic passages, as well as those which were added later. Documents containing allusions to the deeds of Jesus in the Pseudepigrapha are considered by Charlesworth to be Christian interpolations rather than prophetic insights. Likewise, the Book of Mormon passages which give specific details from Jesus' life are assumed to be the work of later editors rather than prophecies of the future. Since this methodology is typical of modern literary analysis of ancient texts, one can glean some idea of how the method works when applied to the Book of Mormon. Unfortunately, the experiment does not validate the method; it simply illustrates it.

As in the case of Charlesworth, one must approach Krister Stendahl's paper knowing that it was written within a methodological framework quite foreign to most Latter-day Saints. The author treats both the Sermon on the Mount and the Sermon in Third Nephi as literary inventions rather than as talks given in history. Even so, the distinctions between the two sources are significant because they suggest that the Book of Mormon is not simply a careless plagiarism of the Biblical passage in question. Stendahl observes that consistently the specific terms "like altar and temple and Jerusalem are

gone" and that "Nephi does not see Jesus as a teacher in his community who takes the ongoing requirements of the Torah for granted. Much of the Jewishness of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew is missing in Third Nephi, not surprising in a society which had been modified during six centuries of separation from Jewish influence. What at first appears critical of the Book of Mormon may, if Mormons do their homework, lead to greater understanding and appreciation of the Nephite record.

Not only is Jane Dillenberger willing to take some examples of "Mormon art" seriously, notably the large paintings of C. C. A. Christensen relating to the saga of Mormonism, but she in turn appeals to Mormons to take art seriously. Her challenge is stated in poignant terms at the end of her paper: "I would appeal to the Mormons to initiate a new 'cleaning of the temple'—to remove the illustrative, shallow socialist-realist-religious art, and wait the coming of artists who are equal to your epic history and your grand vision." This remark epitomizes a difficulty for Latter-day Saints when outsiders examine Mormons and Mormonism carefully. The non-Mormons see all too often that Mormons do not appear to take seriously enough the demands and expectations of the gospel in their personal study and in achieving excellence in religious learning. Instead, a less difficult path is commonly taken within the Church, that of taking *oneself* seriously. This results in a much more shallow and superficial public portrayal of the gospel than it deserves. *Reflections on Mormonism* hopefully will serve as a catalyst to stimulate better scriptural and artistic scholarship within the Restored Church.

The Poetic Mystique

The Grandmother Tree. By Marilyn McMeen Miller Brown. Provo, Utah: Art Publishers, 1978. xiii+56 pp., illus. \$3.95.

Mahanga: Pacific Poems. By Vernice Wineera Pere. Laie, Hawaii: Institute for Polynesian Studies (BYU-Hawaii), 1978. 39 pp., glossary, Paper \$3.00. Cloth \$9.00.

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Beyond the sentience and the craft, under the sound and shape and color of the poem, one seeks the mystique that synthesizes and sets forth a poet's real real-